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New York

President: Mr. Ping ..... (Gabon)

The meeting was called to order at 2.45 p.m.

Tribute to the memory of His Excellency Mr. Yasser Arafat, late President of the Palestinian Authority

The President (*spoke in French*): Before we take up the items on our agenda this afternoon, it is my sad duty to pay tribute to the memory of His Excellency Mr. Yasser Arafat, President of the Palestinian Authority, who passed away today, 11 November 2004.

President Yasser Arafat, who was considered by his people as the father of the nation, dedicated his life to the establishment of a Palestinian State. By signing the Oslo Accords he accepted the principle of the peaceful co-existence of two States, Palestine and Israel. The best tribute to President Arafat would be the achievement of his dream of an independent Palestinian State living in peace and cooperating with all its neighbours.

On behalf of the General Assembly, I request the Observer of Palestine to convey my condolences to the Palestinian people and to the bereaved family.

I invite representatives to stand and observe a minute of silence in tribute to the memory of President Yasser Arafat.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silence.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: For nearly four decades, Yasser Arafat expressed and symbolized in his person the national aspirations of the Palestinian people. He was one of those few leaders who was instantly recognizable by people in any walk of life all around the world.

President Arafat will always be remembered for having led the Palestinians, in 1988, to accept the principle of peaceful coexistence between Israel and a future Palestinian State. By signing the Oslo Accords in 1993, he took a giant step towards the realization of that vision. It is tragic that he did not live to see it fulfilled. Now that he has gone, both Israelis and Palestinians, and the friends of both peoples throughout the world, must make even greater efforts to bring about the peaceful realization of the Palestinian right to self-determination.

Thirty years ago this week, Yasser Arafat stood in this Hall when he became the first representative of a non-governmental organization to speak to a plenary meeting of the General Assembly. One year later, the General Assembly adopted resolution 3237 (XXIX), conferring on the Palestine Liberation Organization the status of observer in the Assembly and in other international conferences held under United Nations auspices.

But the relationship between the United Nations and the Palestinian people is far deeper and broader, and dates back much longer than that. For 55 years, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East has provided humanitarian

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assistance, health care, housing and education to Palestinians. Today, there are a total of 19 United Nations agencies and bodies lending their assistance to the Palestinian people. We must, and will, continue that work for as long as the Palestinian people need our help.

Together with our partners, we will also continue our efforts to achieve the full implementation of the road map, as endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 1515 (2003). Our goal is the realization of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002). That includes as its centrepiece the establishment of a sovereign, democratic, viable and contiguous Palestinian State living side by side in peace with a secure Israel. Although Chairman Arafat did not live to see the attainment of those goals, the world will continue to strive towards them.

Today our condolences go to Chairman Arafat's wife and young daughter, for whom his death is a personal tragedy. Our thoughts and prayers also go to his wider family — the wider family of the Palestinian people — in the hope that they will find the strength, vision and courage to look ahead to the possibility of a peaceful settlement, for the benefit of succeeding generations.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call His Excellency Mr. Crispin Grey-Johnson, Permanent Representative of the Gambia, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Grey-Johnson (Gambia): I speak in the name of the Group of African States. The Group of African States at the United Nations is profoundly saddened by the passing away this morning of Mohammed Yasser Abdul-Raouf Qudwa Al-Husseini, commonly known as Yasser Arafat, President of the Palestinian Authority.

President Arafat was the personification of Palestinian nationalism. Since 1957, when he founded the Fatah movement in Kuwait, to the very last minute of his life, he lived for and advanced the Palestinian cause. Through his exemplary leadership, a Palestinian identity was forged, amplified and consolidated, and the question of Palestine was elevated from a mere footnote to full centre stage of international negotiations and discourse. The movement for the independence of the Palestinian people grew into the creation of the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1964, with a military wing — the Palestine Liberation Army — added to it in 1970.

In recognition of his efforts to have his people renounce violence, embrace peace and recognize the State of Israel through the Declaration of Principles, which he signed with the Israelis in 1993, Mr. Arafat was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize along with Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin of Israel. In 1994 the Palestinian Authority was created by the Oslo Accords, and he was elected its first President two years later — a position he held until his death this morning at the age of 75.

Abu Ammar, as he was affectionately called by his people, committed his entire life to the cause of freedom for all the world's oppressed people, for the liberation of the Palestinian people and the return of their heritage — a cause he vociferously defended on numerous occasions in this very Hall. For good or for ill, he has left his footprints on the sands of time. It is our fervent prayer that the peace that he sought for his people throughout the course of his life will soon radiate not only among Palestinians, but also among all people in the Middle East and beyond.

We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family, to the Palestinian Authority and to all the people of Palestine. May his soul rest in peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Rezlan Ishar Jenie of Indonesia, to speak on behalf of the Asian States.

Mr. Jenie (Indonesia): I join you today as Chairman of the Group of Asian States to pay tribute to President Yasser Arafat, who passed away on 11 November 2004 at 3.30 a.m., Paris time.

We join the Palestinian people in mourning his death and regret that he did not live to see the birth of an independent Palestine. As the father of the Palestinian people, he kept the dream of an independent homeland burning ever brightly. However, a prolonged illegal occupation, which continues even today, prevented this from becoming a reality during his lifetime.

I would like to recall that exactly 30 years ago, in November 1974, President Arafat, the symbol of the genuine Palestinian struggle for independence, first spoke at a plenary meeting of the General Assembly of this Organization. It was clear then that his firm

struggle for the independence of his country did not blind him to the need for compromise. On that historic occasion he offered an olive branch to facilitate a peaceful settlement of the political issues surrounding Palestine's independence.

In the years following that address, despite the many adversities he had to endure, President Arafat's determination to lead the Palestinian people to a just and lasting peace never wavered. Arming himself with courage and hope, he brought the peace of the brave to the Oslo Accords of 1993 and to the subsequent talks in Washington.

His permanent desire was justice and peace for a people who were only too familiar with the harshness of oppression. Having been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994, he made known the depth of his desire for peace by stating, "We will discover ourselves through peace more than we did through confrontation and conflict". Peace, he reasoned, was indispensable to Palestinian ambitions for independence and sovereignty.

Yet the ferocity of the repression of the Palestinian people did not lessen over the years. But he matched its intensity with his commitment and undying optimism. Because of this, he was a much loved and respected figure, not only by the Palestinian people but by many all over the world, including Asia.

Despite repeated attempts and negotiations — including the famous road map brokered by the Quartet in 2002 with the objective of setting up a two-State solution in 2005 — he was effectively prevented from fully leading his people to peace or to the creation of a Palestinian State. His last days were unfortunately spent as a virtual prisoner in his compound in Ramallah.

Though his hope for gaining independence for the people of Palestine has not been achieved, that does not mean that the flame for independence has been extinguished. Palestine has lost its beloved leader, but the people have not lost their esteem and desire for liberty and independence.

All of Asia extends heartfelt condolences to the people of Palestine and the bereaved family. We pray to God the Almighty for the late President Yasser Arafat and for his family to be blessed with patience and strength in this time of deep sorrow.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Andrei Dapkiunas, the representative of Belarus, to speak on behalf of the Eastern European States.

Mr. Dapkiunas (Belarus): On behalf of the Group of Eastern European States, I have the sad duty of expressing a deep sense of grief and compassion on the passing away of President Yasser Arafat.

The life and work of President Arafat were inseparably connected with the struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable rights for a better and safer future in their homeland.

President Arafat will be remembered as a lifelong and committed advocate of the Palestinian cause and an important participant in the historic 1993 Oslo Accords. The Nobel Peace Prize of 1994 was a deserved acknowledgement of President Arafat's role and contribution to the peace process in the Middle East.

As a person and as a statesman, Yasser Arafat has left a significant and undisputed imprint, not just on the modern history of the Middle East, but on world politics of past decades as well.

On behalf of the delegations of the States of the Eastern European Group, I convey deep condolences to the family of the late President Arafat and the mourning people of Palestine, the homeland he loved so much and devoted his whole life to. May his soul rest in peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to Mr. Eduardo Sevilla Somoza, representative of Nicaragua, speaking on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Sevilla Somoza (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): On this occasion of profound sadness for the Palestinian people, I wish, on behalf of the members of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, to pay tribute to the memory of President Yasser Arafat, an historic figure who had an impact on the world until he drew his last breath.

The great majority of Palestinians feel they have lost their leader, their master, the father of the State. Unquestionably, he symbolized the feelings of his people. In his person he represented the aspirations of a whole people, raising to a world level his conviction for the establishment of a sovereign State.

The countries of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States express our most heartfelt condolences upon the passing of President Arafat to the Palestinian people and all members of his family, particularly Suha, now the widow of President Arafat, and her young daughter, Zahwa.

Our feelings of solidarity and support at this time of such sorrow and distress also go most particularly to Ambassador Nasser Al-Kidwa and the other members of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations.

The countries of the Group urge the Palestinian people and its leaders to keep alive the ideals of their greatest representative with a view to creating a free and sovereign Palestinian State, economically viable, but above all, dedicated to peace, not only for Palestine but for the whole of the Middle East and the rest of the world.

The President (*spoke in French*): I call on Mr. Don MacKay, representative of New Zealand, to speak on behalf of the Western European and Other States Group.

Mr. MacKay (New Zealand): As Chairman of the Western European and Other States Group, I would like to address the Assembly today to express condolences and sympathies to the family of President Arafat and to the Palestinian people on the passing of Yasser Arafat, President of the Palestinian Authority.

Over the last four decades President Arafat came to symbolize the Palestinian national movement and the aspirations of the Palestinian people. President Arafat was respected by the Palestinians and others as a leader who symbolized their long search for statehood and independence and led the Palestinians to a historic acceptance of the principle of peaceful coexistence between Israel and a future Palestinian State.

The Palestinian leadership will now have to shoulder the heavy burden and responsibility of carrying that vision of two States living side by side in peace and security and bringing it to fruition. It is to be hoped that the international community will provide every support it can to achieve this vision.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to Mr. Omar Bashir Mohamed Manis, the representative of Sudan, on behalf of the Arab States.

Mr. Manis (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): The late President Arafat continued to work to achieve the legitimate aspirations and dreams of the Palestinian people to have an independent Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, to spread peace and establish stability, and for it, he sacrificed everything that was precious to him in order to achieve this noble goal. He endured all forms of unjust treatment, torture, siege, humiliation and displacement for this just cause.

The Arab and Islamic nation, with the loss of President Arafat loses a symbol of Palestinian struggle and a strong, unique and distinguished leader in the history of the Palestinian struggle. It has lost a fighter president that was at the forefront of all efforts to unite the Arab position in the darkest of moments and circumstances. He worked with true faith and real interaction in order to keep the Palestinian cause — the central cause of all Arabs — alive, despite the intransigence and the oppression of the Israeli occupation forces that have rejected all binding resolutions, and to regain usurped Palestinian rights.

Despite forced imprisonment and his recent illness, he worked to mobilize sincere Arabic and international efforts towards the peace process, taking courageous and insightful decisions in order to pursue a peaceful settlement and the establishment of a legitimate and independent Palestinian State through hard and serious negotiations until these efforts were crowned with the signing of many agreements.

Despite the tragedy of losing President Arafat today, we trust that the peace process and the path that he has drawn for his people in calling for their legitimate right to the liberation of Palestine from the occupiers and for establishing their legitimate State on Palestinian soil, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, will always be a beacon.

With hearts that are heavy with pain and sadness and with deep faith and surrender to the will of God we are shocked by the loss of brother President Yasser Arafat, whose loss is a source of great sadness and grief to the Palestinian people, to the Arab and Islamic nations and to all peace-loving countries and peoples, as well as to all those who care about the peace process in the Middle East.

On behalf of the Arab Group, we offer our deepest and sincerest condolences to the family of the late President and to the heroic Palestinian people and to Arabs everywhere and to all the peace-loving

peoples who seek liberation, and we call on God Almighty to grant him heaven with the martyrs and the righteous for they are the best of companions.

The Palestinian people, with the loss of their President Yasser Arafat, have lost a courageous fighter, an inspirational and steadfast leader who never wavered in his diligent effort to liberate Palestine, in his honourable and brave national struggle and in his real belief in the justice of his people's cause and the legitimacy of their struggle over the decades. President Arafat led the struggle of the Palestinian people with great wisdom and insight. He firmly defended the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, while maintaining the unity of their parties, without discriminating against any. He remained committed to his national principles with rare strength, willpower and courage. We hope his inspiration will continue to be a beacon for his people and for the Palestinian leaders, so that they may achieve the aspirations that he sought all his life to accomplish.

Although President Arafat is absent today, his ideals and principles will survive and will continue to be our guiding light. We are from God and to Him we shall return.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the representative of the Netherlands, who will speak on behalf of the European Union.

Mr. Van den Berg (Netherlands): On behalf of the countries of European Union (EU), I would like to convey our profound condolences to Madame Arafat, to the family of the deceased and to the Palestinian people.

The Palestinian people have lost a historic leader and a democratically elected President. Mr. Arafat's devotion and single-minded commitment to the Palestinian national cause throughout his life has never been in doubt. He did not live to see the birth of a Palestinian State. However, the European Union will work with the Palestinian authorities and the international community to contribute to realizing the aspirations of the Palestinian people.

The European Union would like to commend the Palestinian leadership for their demonstration of dignity and responsibility in order to maintain the Palestinian institutions at this difficult time. We also pay tribute to the Palestinian people, who support their leadership. We wish to stress that the Palestinian people can count on the undiminished support of the European Union on the path towards a peaceful, durable and just settlement of the conflict. We are convinced that this goal can be achieved for both Israelis and Palestinians.

On a more personal note, we, the Permanent Representatives of the European Union, would also like to convey our heartfelt condolences to our colleague Nasser Al-Kidwa, the Permanent Observer of Palestine, who lost a President, as well as a family member. Our sympathies are with him. May Nasser have the strength and the courage to overcome this grave loss.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the representative of Malaysia, who will speak on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Mr. Rastam (Malaysia): I have the honour and the sad duty to speak on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) on this solemn occasion to pay tribute to the memory of the late President Yasser Arafat, who passed away on 11 November 2004. I extend the sincere condolences and heartfelt sympathies of the member countries of the Non-Aligned Movement to Madame Suha Arafat and the family, the Observer Delegation of Palestine to the General Assembly, the Palestinian Authority and all Palestinians, over the passing of President Yasser Arafat, a loving father and husband, a learned tutor and an inspiring leader of the Palestinian people.

President Arafat was not only a leader of the Palestinians, but was also among the influential leaders within the Non-Aligned Movement. Together with our Palestinian brothers and sisters, the member countries of NAM mourn with great sadness and deep sorrow his untimely departure.

President Arafat will be forever remembered, not only by Palestinians but also by people from all parts of the world, for his immense courage, enormous sacrifice and strong determination in championing and protecting the inalienable right to self-determination of the people of Palestine and their claim to their own sovereign homeland. He devoted his life to that struggle — against all odds — for almost four decades, including suffering the indignity of being virtually imprisoned by the Israelis at the Muqataa in Ramallah. President Arafat will indelibly remain the icon of the Palestinian struggle against injustice, against brutal oppression, against subjugation, as well as against the

forces that seek to deny the Palestinian people their dignity, freedom and independence. It must be remembered that until his death, President Arafat remained the duly elected leader of the Palestinian people and therefore had the right to represent them, although certain quarters did not wish to acknowledge that.

President Arafat's leadership of the Palestinian people may have come to an end, but, his legacy of iron will and fighting spirit, which he lived by all his life will continue to inspire the Palestinian people and those who share the legitimate cause of the Palestinians. The Non-Aligned Movement is confident that our brothers and sisters in Palestine will remain calm and stand united during this most difficult time, in order to collectively address the many challenges ahead.

The memory of President Arafat should serve to motivate all Palestinians to display solidarity in order to secure, without delay, an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital. As a fitting tribute to President Arafat's memory, NAM will continue to support the struggle of the Palestinians to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and the establishment of the State of Palestine, living side by side with the State of Israel in peace within secure and recognized borders. NAM will remain strongly supportive of all endeavours aimed at addressing the Palestinian question, a question that has been high on the agenda of the Non-Aligned Movement since the Movement's establishment in September 1961.

NAM calls upon all Member States of the United Nations, and in particular members of the Quartet, to closely monitor the situation in Palestine, as well as to restrain Israel from exploiting, in any manner, the present circumstances. We believe that it is timely for urgent measures to be taken to implement the road map for peace in the Middle East without any further delay.

The contributions of President Yasser Arafat to the Movement will long be remembered within NAM. His untimely departure is a great loss, not only to the Palestinian people, but also to all people who believe in the just struggle that he led. May God Almighty bless his soul with mercy and compassion.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the representative of Turkey, who is speaking on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Mr. Cengizer (Turkey): It is my solemn and sad duty to speak on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference on our loss of a valiant leader of the Palestinian people, President Yasser Arafat. As evidenced by the numerous speakers who have taken the floor before me, representing the four corners of the world, this is a sad day for all humanity.

The Muslim world, about to observe the felicitous occasion of Eid Al-Fitr, grieves, but in a most meaningful way. The Muslim world joins its Palestinian brothers and sisters in this great loss. More than anyone else, President Arafat epitomized the rightful struggle of his people. There is no doubt that the flame he lit and nurtured with singular courage and determination against all odds, yet which burned unabated for more than half a century, will continue until Palestinian statehood is achieved.

In that spirit, we stand with our Palestinian brothers and sisters in their implacable grief and pay heartfelt tribute to President Arafat's unforgettable memory and struggle for justice, which he sought until the very end. We pray for his soul, his family and his brethren all over the world, and we salute once again his ideals, which will never fade away.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Senegal, Mr. Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Badji (Senegal) (Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I wish to express how deeply saddened we are by the death of Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority.

The Palestinian people have lost a most ardent leader of their cause, a determined fighter, an unequalled strategist and a visionary leader who for decades was the living symbol of the courage, tenacity, resistance and unity of the Palestinian people and of their legitimate aspiration to freedom, sovereignty and national independence.

Over the last 10 years President Arafat undertook a historic fight to achieve what he often called the peace of the brave and the goal of establishing the

State of Palestine, living side by side with Israel — a goal that would bring peace, security and stability to the region.

The Committee hopes that in these times of hardship the Palestinian people will remain united and determined to continue on the road to peace marked out by President Arafat. We will support the Palestinian people until their inalienable rights are fully realized, in perfect harmony with international legality.

The Committee will continue to work for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, in conformity with the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law. The Committee believes that the road map remains the best way to attain a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine through the establishment of two States, Israel and Palestine, based on the 1967 borders and the relevant United Nations resolutions. Any unilateral act by either party will not contribute to a lasting settlement unless it is in conformity with the spirit of negotiations between the two sides and the road map. The Committee hopes that the Quartet and the international community will continue to work to achieve that goal. That would be the best tribute to President Arafat.

The Committee conveys its deepest condolences to the family of President Arafat, the entire Palestinian people and Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa, our fellow Committee member, on the occasion of this cruel loss.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on Mr. Amr Aboul Atta, chargé d'affaires of Egypt.

Mr. Aboul Atta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Assembly is meeting today at a time of great sorrow, not just for the Arab world but for the entire free world. Yesterday we lost a brave fighter, a steadfast leader and a unique nationalist, the late President Arafat.

The Government and the people of Egypt offer their sincerest condolences to the brotherly Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority and its institutions on the occasion of the death of the late President Arafat. He embodied the national struggle for freedom and independence in our modern-day history.

The memory of peoples and the pages of history have never forgotten the great sacrifices that were made by symbols of national struggle such as Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Ghandi. The two achieved the dream of freedom and national independence. The name of the late President Arafat will forever remain a symbol of the history of the Palestinian people's national struggle since Israel first occupied the territory of Palestine and since the Palestinians first strove for self-determination.

Yasser Arafat was not just a symbol of the national struggle against foreign occupation; he was a dedicated political leader. He exerted every effort possible and bore great hardships and suffering to carry the olive branch and extend his hand in peace in order to achieve a political settlement that would end the bloodshed of innocent people, recover all rights and achieve self-determination for an entire people, ending a conflict that has clouded our lives for decades.

Regrettably, fate did not allow President Arafat to achieve the fruit of his long struggle, fulfil his long-held wish to pray at Al-Aqsa Mosque and see the free flag of the State of Palestine fly high over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as a symbol of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

History will not forget that at a time when human rights are defended and the principles of international law and international legitimacy are respected, as are the will and firm right of peoples to self-determination, the leader of an Arab people lived under a humiliating siege for more than two years in his own land and in his own country, deprived of even the most basic human rights.

The leadership and people of the Arab Republic of Egypt have full and unwavering confidence that the values and principles that guided President Arafat in the struggle of his people over many long years will not be lost. The Palestinian people will rapidly overcome their sorrow to rally around a national leadership that will continue the struggle to achieve a just and comprehensive peace and regain all Palestinian rights.

The situation in the Middle East is continuing to develop rapidly and successively. Some developments serve to intensify feelings of frustration and despair, but some do provide a ray of hope for a future that may be brighter for the generations to come. We are very hopeful that the course of action that President Arafat initiated will be continued and that the next stage will see a real activation of the peace process and a return by both parties to the negotiating table, especially

given the increased attention by the main international parties with a view to reactivating the peace process and proposing serious initiatives in this regard.

The President (*spoke in French*): I call on the observer of Palestine.

Ms. Barghouti (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): With great sorrow and sadness, the Palestinian leadership and the entire Palestinian people wish it to be known that President Arafat — the leader, the teacher, the son and the symbol of Palestine, the architect of its current national movement, the hero of all of its battles for freedom and independence — passed away at the dawn of this day.

President Arafat has left this world, and his great heart has stilled. His pure spirit has returned to its creator. But he will remain as long as his great people remain, because he was a leader of their political struggle and their great march to build a national identity on their national soil. He was the symbol of their aspiration for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with its capital at Al-Quds al-Sharif, and for their liberation from the shackles of displacement, refugee status and occupation. Today we have lost the great leader of our struggle, one who strove for the freedom of his nation — the great leader of the movement for national liberation and independence. But he has left us a great universal and national legacy — one that represents our hope for a bright future of peace, freedom and development for our people and for all peoples.

President Arafat has passed on — he who was raised on the streets of Jerusalem and who lived his life in the hope that it would become the capital of an independent Palestine. Today, his tomb looks towards Al-Quds al-Sharif. He will lie close to Al-Aqsa, with a handful of the soil of Al-Quds al-Sharif.

In two days' time we will celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the historic statement delivered by President Arafat to the Assembly in 1974, the statement that placed the Palestinian people and their legitimate political rights on the international agenda and made the question of Palestine one of the most prominent just causes. He introduced the cause of the Palestinian people to the Assembly not just as a humanitarian question or a question of refugees, but as an issue involving a people struggling for their right to self-determination and independence. Since that time, the United Nations has addressed the question of Palestine in all its aspects and by every means in fulfilment of its permanent legal, moral and political responsibility towards the Palestinian people.

The Palestinian people will miss President Arafat's great courage, attachment to principle, clear strategic vision and wise leadership. But the Palestinian people can take solace in the knowledge that they do not stand alone in their just struggle for freedom and independence. The generous support of all members of the Assembly means a great deal to us and gives us confidence in the justice of our cause and the inevitability of our triumph. We thank the Assembly, the Secretary-General and all fraternal and friendly States for their sincere expressions of condolence and their warm sentiments, which we greatly appreciate. We will be sure to convey them to the Palestinian leadership and to the family of the late President.

In this regard, we would like to inform the Assembly that the mission of Palestine will be open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Monday and Tuesday, 15 and 16 November, to all delegations wishing to express their condolences on the passing of the President.

We are of God, and to Him we return.

Agenda item 39 (*continued*)

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

(a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/59/93 and A/59/374)

(c) Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General (A/59/121)

Draft resolution (A/59/L.24)

Mr. Zain (Malaysia): I would like first of all to express our deepest sorrow and grief over the untimely passing of President Yasser Arafat and to convey our condolences to the Palestinian people.

My delegation would like to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report under agenda item 39 (c),

"Assistance to the Palestinian people", covering the period May 2003 to April 2004, as contained in document A/59/121.

The past year has been marked by dramatic events. It had offered new hope of a peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, pursuant to the publication by the Quartet of the performance-based road map. Hopes were subsequently raised even further when the Prime Ministers of Israel and of Palestine committed themselves to working collectively towards the full implementation of the road map. The Aqaba Summit had also lent necessary impetus in that connection. However, the implementation of the road map has stalled, thereby rendering the achievement of the envisaged peaceful solution elusive. Even as we meet here today, events in and relating to the Middle East region are still unfolding with uncertainty.

Although they may not necessarily be at the centre of global and political attention, the role and functions of United Nations agencies and other humanitarian organizations in the occupied territories are crucial and indispensable. Malaysia has noted with utmost concern that, as pointed out in the report of the Secretary-General, the provision by United Nations agencies and programmes of a variety of types of assistance to the Palestinian people has as its backdrop an increasingly difficult humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Such assistance has been provided, and continues to be provided, under difficult circumstances, in the face of the dire consequences of the repressive administrative and security regimes and measures imposed by the Government of Israel. These have negatively affected the well-being of the Palestinian people. They also hamper the ability of United Nations agencies in the field to carry out their work.

My delegation strongly urges Israel to allow unfettered access to staff members of United Nations agencies and humanitarian workers in the occupied territories. We are alarmed over an observation in the report that it has become increasingly difficult for United Nations agencies to operate there, given that the importance of those agencies and their role in the occupied territories has never been greater.

As a matter of priority, the Government of Israel must ease restrictions and work closely with United Nations agencies, donors and humanitarian organizations to ensure that aid and development projects are delivered in a timely and comprehensive manner. We believe that the effective steps currently being undertaken by the Palestinian Authority to accommodate Israel's security concerns will facilitate such an effort.

All of this notwithstanding, Malaysia is satisfied with the performance of the relevant United Nations agencies in carrying out various efforts and programmes to provide a variety of types of economic, humanitarian and social assistance to Palestinian civilians and institutions, as reflected, in considerable detail, in paragraphs 21 through 64 of the report. The ever-growing sector of "unmet needs", as documented in paragraphs 80 through 84 of the report, requires particularly focused attention. All these efforts and programmes, if successfully implemented, could certainly create the necessary environment to facilitate the achievement of sustainable peace in the region.

We are concerned, however, that the implementation of practically all of these efforts and programmes is being hindered by a lack of financial and other resources. We urge the international donor community to increase its contributions to this cause. The international community must not lose its focus despite the challenges facing it and the sense of hopelessness. For their part, the Government and the people of Malaysia will continue to extend assistance, in their own small way and within their means, to our brothers and sisters in Palestine.

Malaysia supports the continued efforts being made to support the peace process by the Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority. We welcome the attempts that have been made to ensure effective coordination between the relevant institutions of the Palestinian Authority, the United Nations and the international community. Malaysia urges the Special Coordinator and his Office to continue with such efforts and to intensify them where possible and necessary.

However, the success of those efforts, as everyone knows, will be highly contingent upon the fullest cooperation extended by the Government of Israel and its apparatus. Therefore, we call upon Israel, the occupying Power, to cooperate in the interests of ensuring peace in the long term.

The construction by Israel of the separation wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, has added a new dimension to the problem of providing assistance to the Palestinian people. It has had an adverse impact on the living conditions and freedom of movement of Palestinian civilians. The impact of the wall on Palestinian lives and on the territorial integrity of a future State of Palestine is prejudicial to the very idea of the two-State solution, as envisaged in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002). The International Court of Justice, in its advisory opinion rendered last July, concluded that the construction of the wall in the occupied territories was contrary to international law, that such construction should be stopped and reversed, that those completed sections of the wall should be dismantled and removed, and that Israel should make reparations to those affected by such construction. The General Assembly responded expeditiously to the advisory opinion by adopting resolution ES-10/15. We urge all Member States, in particular Israel, to take all measures necessary to ensure compliance with the provisions of the resolution. We also urge the Security Council to seriously look into this matter.

No matter how substantial the amount of financial resources that are available, humanitarian and financial assistance will not forever and by itself resolve the political crisis affecting the lives of the Palestinians and the Israelis. The solution remains in the ending of occupation, respect for international law and the achievement of a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The events of the past year have demonstrated to us how desperately the people of the Middle East need a political solution to their protracted conflict. Peace will remain elusive unless all parties concerned, the region and the wider international community are prepared to play their part responsibly and with a high degree of political will.

My delegation reaffirms the permanent responsibility of the United Nations, including the General Assembly and the Security Council, towards the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects on the basis of international law. As a member of the Quartet, the United Nations is well placed to play a pivotal role towards achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace settlement and towards achieving the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. In that connection, my delegation believes that it would be only sensible for Member States to join the consensus in support of draft resolution A/59/L.24 on this agenda item.

Mr. Laurin (Canada): Canada would like to take this opportunity to present its vision on strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance. Coordination is vital because of its direct impact in the field. Ultimately, we all are working to meet the needs of affected populations. Protecting civilians in armed conflict is central to this objective.

Canada was pleased with the Secretary-General's decision to emphasize the protection of civilians in armed conflict as an annual theme for the treaty ratification campaign. This is an important opportunity for States to show their commitment to fulfilling their promise under paragraph 26 of the Millennium Declaration to "expand and strengthen the protection of civilians in complex emergencies".

The Secretary-General's decision also coincides with the fifth anniversary of two pivotal Security Council resolutions related to this topic: resolution 1265 (1999) of September 1999 and resolution 1296 (2000) of April 2000. Those two resolutions, along with the resulting discussions and actions, represent a turning point where the international community recognized — beyond the security of humanitarian convoys — the security of people and the need to act to protect them. We are pleased with the progress that has been made in recent years, but now we must work to implement this normative framework.

The international community must react strongly to violations of international humanitarian law and human rights. It must promote the responsibility of affected States to ensure that civilians are protected, and be prepared to react when those States do not protect civilians. We must make more effective use of the tools we have developed over the past five years to protect civilians, and we must create new ones when warranted. An energetic battle must be waged against impunity.

We believe that specialized United Nations country teams and humanitarian and resident coordinators must be better equipped to address protection-related issues. Their ability to effectively identify those issues and to develop relevant strategies to meet the challenges that occur in crisis situations must be enhanced. Our efforts should take gender issues into account. We hope that the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's recently completed review of its

1999 policy statement on gender mainstreaming in humanitarian assistance will be able to support efforts in that regard.

We also think that regional organizations can and must play a more active role in promoting civilian protection. We strongly encourage the United Nations to enhance its dialogue with those organizations so they can do so. We commend the African Union's creation of the position of Special Representative for the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and we are following its cooperation with the United Nations with great interest.

There have recently been timely, highly constructive discussions among humanitarian actors about how to increase the security of personnel while maintaining a presence in difficult field situations. We attach great importance to the efforts and recommendations proposed by the Secretary-General on how to strengthen the United Nations security management system. In particular, we support the emphasis placed on decentralization in the field. This should begin to respond to certain concerns expressed by humanitarian actors. We invite the United Nations humanitarian agencies to support the reformed security management system and to ensure that it responds to their needs.

It is important to clarify the interrelationship between political, humanitarian and military actors. The clarification of each role is tied to the evolving security context in the United Nations. This has notable effects on humanitarian coordination in the field. States must continue to ensure that military activities do not inadvertently undermine humanitarian principles and activities. The guidelines on civil-military coordination issued by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) are a useful reference.

(*spoke in French*)

In principle, Canada supports the concept of integrated missions but believes that determining when recourse to that kind of mission is required should be facilitated by increased dialogue with United Nations humanitarian assistance actors. Integrated missions make it possible to react to crises in a more consistent and effective manner, in particular by taking humanitarian factors into account in political decisions and by strengthening the protection of civilians. The success of such missions depends on solid cooperation between political, peacekeeping, humanitarian and development segments of the United Nations under the critical leadership of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the humanitarian and resident coordinators. We are pleased that OCHA and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations are working together to assess the experience acquired to date in implementing integrated missions.

Providing timely, flexible resources that are proportional to the needs of various crises remains a difficult objective to achieve. For the past year, donors have made constant progress in pursuing the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative. Donors are endeavouring to establish a comprehensive definition of humanitarian action for statistical purposes and to harmonize the reporting requirements of humanitarian organizations. Last October, donors met in Canada to renew their commitment to making progress and to identify ways to give concrete expression to that commitment. The Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative is part of the long-term outlook, and its success will help improve the international response to populations in crisis situations.

While endeavouring to become better humanitarian donors, we are striving to respond more consistently to transition situations. Donors themselves often undermine their humanitarian assistance investments by not helping the target countries to implement the necessary foundations for lasting peace and stability when they emerge from a crisis. In that regard, we appreciated the discussions among States at the Economic and Social Council last July, and we believe that such dialogue must continue. We also believe that United Nations agencies must play a leadership role in helping the international community meet that challenge.

Again this year, millions of people throughout the world were seriously affected by natural disasters. Unfortunately, the hurricane season did not spare the Americas and Asia, and this is a sad reminder of our continued vulnerability in the face of such catastrophes. They demonstrated the benefits of relying on the strengths of existing multilateral, regional and local partnerships to avert disaster and to intervene in emergencies. More than ever, States play a central role in ensuring that natural disaster prevention is a top national priority.

In closing, I wish to say that effective humanitarian action is not an abstract concept. In the

field it finds direct expression in responding to the rights of people in danger. We must therefore take steps that are highly tangible as well as political. Many examples come to mind: ratifying and implementing international instruments that contribute to the protection of civilians, promoting General Assembly resolutions that allow for improved international response, and building the capacities of both countries in crisis situations and the organizations that support them. Because of its fundamental importance, Canada will continue to promote more effective humanitarian action.

Mr. Kim Sam-hoon (Republic of Korea): Before I begin my statement, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my deep condolences to the people of Palestine on the passing away of President Yasser Arafat early this morning.

I would like to begin by commending the Secretary-General for his unswerving dedication to the Organization's work on behalf of the world's needy peoples. I also thank the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Jan Egeland, and his staff at the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for their focused approach in dealing with the issue of coordinating emergency humanitarian assistance. We believe that, with strengthened coordination, humanitarian assistance will more effectively reach those in need, and we fully support that important goal.

The importance of cooperation and coordination among United Nations agencies in humanitarian work cannot be overstated. In the area of disaster management and risk reduction, we believe that humanitarian and development organizations should work together and strengthen coordination so that they may make better use of lessons learned. This knowledge-sharing will allow them not only to respond better to immediate crises but also to more systematically develop institutional and legislative risk reduction mechanisms.

Furthermore, information management is a critical component of emergency response because effective emergency response depends on access to timely and reliable information. In that regard, my delegation fully supports the efforts of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Disaster Reduction to standardize, aggregate and link disaster-related data from various sources.

The recent kidnapping of three United Nations election monitors in Afghanistan underscores the point that the work of the United Nations in assisting people in need around the world has become an immensely dangerous endeavour. The Republic of Korea believes that there is no higher priority for the United Nations as an organization than to ensure the safety and security of its own personnel. Indeed, in many parts of the world, security is a prerequisite for programme delivery. Moreover, lack of security and inadequate attention to the safety of United Nations and local staff in the field can have pernicious effects, such as eroding staff morale and stifling initiative. Accordingly, we express our deep concern at the recent heightened attacks against the United Nations and other humanitarian personnel. There can be no excuse for such horrific actions towards aid workers, and we hope to see the perpetrators of these attacks brought to justice as soon as possible.

In this regard, the Republic of Korea welcomes the Secretary-General's recent initiative to strengthen security for United Nations humanitarian assistance and other staff in response to the new security climate. We believe that many of the Secretary-General's proposals, such as an integrated security structure at the field level and at Headquarters, merit serious consideration. At the same time, there are some aspects of the proposal that require further clarification. We look forward to participating in a rigorous discussion on the Secretary-General's initiative.

As the Secretary-General rightly pointed out, gender differences and inequalities influence the capacities and vulnerabilities of affected populations and affect the overall effectiveness of humanitarian response. In this connection, we support the renewed efforts to strengthen gender analysis in the common humanitarian action plans. Moreover, it is essential for us to ensure that projects included within the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) coincide with an agreed analysis of priority needs and response.

Nevertheless, we are concerned that there continue to be serious gaps in integrating gender into humanitarian response and assistance. The systematic implementation of gender mainstreaming guidelines in field operations remains weak. There is also a need to incorporate gender and age-disaggregated data into each key sector of the planning of humanitarian assistance. In all of these efforts, my delegation believes it is essential that we remain cognizant of

women's unique role and plight in emergency situations and that we tailor our response accordingly. Gender is not a discrete issue to be tackled independently. Rather, it is central to our efforts to provide effective humanitarian assistance during emergency situations.

In an era of scarce and dwindling resources, the Republic of Korea attaches great importance to the transparent and appropriate allocation of humanitarian assistance funds. We support the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative, which aims to ensure that humanitarian assistance is provided in accordance with humanitarian principles and based on demonstrable needs. Furthermore, we anticipate that the needs assessment framework and matrix, recently developed within the Consolidated Appeals Process, will allow country teams to better organize information on beneficiaries. Moreover, my delegation is of the view that the stringent monitoring of humanitarian assistance funds disbursed during emergency situations is crucial to ensure the optimal utilization of scarce resources. For this reason, we remain strong supporters of the Appeals Process system, because we believe that it helps ensure that humanitarian assistance actually reaches those in need.

New and complex emergencies are increasingly characterized by interrelated humanitarian crises. Effectively tackling these emergencies requires viewing humanitarian assistance as one component in a long-term effort towards rehabilitation and development. Accordingly, a focus on the broader transition from relief to development is vital to ensuring long-term success. In this regard, we underscore the importance of finding the appropriate balance between short-term quick-impact projects and longer-term institution-building, particularly in an environment of scarce resources.

The complex emergencies of the twenty-first century demand new multifaceted solutions. Strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance during these emergencies should remain a key priority of the United Nations, and the Republic of Korea firmly pledges its support towards this end.

Mr. Sinaga (Indonesia): Allow me at the outset to express my delegation's deep condolences to the Government and people of Palestine with regard to the passing away of President Yasser Arafat today.

My delegation wishes to express our sincere appreciation for the reports of the Secretary-General on humanitarian assistance issues (A/59/93, A/59/374). My delegation notes with concern the scale and large number of natural disasters that occurred in 2003 and 2004, which have affected more than 284 million people and caused more than $65 billion worth of material damage. We are pleased that the timely and effective response by Governments and the international community to these disasters has continued to be critical in saving lives and mitigating their effects. We also support the efforts of the United Nations to expand the participation of Member States in its disaster response network as well as foster a regional approach to natural disaster response.

Current trends in urbanization, environmental degradation and climate change imply that natural and man-made emergencies will continue to increase in their regularity and intensity. In this regard, we as Member States need to improve our response, capacity and preparedness so as to reduce vulnerability. We need to continue to improve disaster management abilities and enhance regional capacity while embracing risk reduction as a core principle.

Allow me to turn now to the issue of humanitarian assistance given to countless undergoing or emerging from a humanitarian crisis, induced by conflict or natural causes. While I confirm my delegation's appreciation to the United Nations for its support of the countless people affected by natural and man-made disasters, we are concerned that the global level of financing for humanitarian operations often remains insufficient, especially in African countries, where the magnitude of the problem is considerable. Beyond this, the core issue in the transition from relief to development is that funds are often insufficient for implementation programmes.

Indonesia would like to emphasize the importance of enhanced international cooperation, including through the United Nations and regional organizations, with the consent of the affected countries and according to the principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality, as guaranteed by international law and emphasized in General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991. That would assist countries in their efforts to build capacity and help them to predict, prepare for and respond to natural disasters.

International awareness of humanitarian problems has grown considerably over the years. In that connection, many Governments have greatly improved their preparedness in, for example, facilitating the return and resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said with respect to the situation in Palestine. Despite the increasingly difficult humanitarian situation there, United Nations agencies continue to render assistance to the Palestinian people. Such assistance is provided under complex circumstances, characterized by closures, curfews, incursions and other measures imposed by the Israeli military, all of which negatively affect the well-being of the Palestinian people and hinder the efforts of the United Nations. Indonesia joins the community of nations in calling upon the Government of Israel to halt all actions that encroach on the territorial rights of the Palestinians, to strictly observe the provisions of international law and to implement the road map.

Furthermore, it must be emphasized that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) should remain a purely humanitarian and non-political agency. Humanitarian assistance must be delivered only with the consent of the affected country and with respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States. We must maintain the practice that the affected State must have the primary role in coordinating humanitarian relief efforts, with UNHCR providing support as requested by the State.

Mr. Kulyk (Ukraine): At the outset, I would like to commend the Secretary-General for the thorough analysis and action-oriented recommendations contained in his report on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/59/93).

My delegation notes with satisfaction the expanded activities of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the efforts to strengthen the role of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee as one of the key mechanisms for policy alignment and integrated response on the part of all United Nations agencies.

Looking back at developments over the past year, one should recognize the persistence of serious humanitarian challenges. Restricted humanitarian access, non-compliance with international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles and continued attacks on humanitarian workers could all again be mentioned in that regard, but it is even more disturbing that humanitarian concerns such as the spread of HIV/AIDS, sexual exploitation and the abuse of civilians in humanitarian crises have been looming large.

My delegation appreciates the progress made in strengthening the United Nations response in the areas of emergency preparedness, contingency planning and disaster management at both the system-wide and the field levels.

As the Secretary-General's report emphasizes, the past year saw a number of tragic losses of humanitarian personnel and alarming disrespect for their work and special role. Such a climate of insecurity cannot be tolerated. My delegation takes this opportunity to urge the Governments and parties concerned to fully ensure the safety and security of humanitarian staff and the legal prosecution of those responsible for attacks against United Nations personnel.

Ukraine is concerned at the alarming spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in humanitarian crises, which further amplifies the suffering of the civilian population. It is particularly discouraging that HIV/AIDS, coupled with famine and natural disasters, is driving ever-larger parts of nations towards destitution. In that context, we would like to stress the need to ensure the full and effective implementation of the General Assembly's Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, which sets the stage and the agenda for dealing decisively with the epidemic in conflict situations. Integration of HIV/AIDS considerations into humanitarian programmes, beginning with consolidated appeals and humanitarian action plans, are also essential to facilitate a comprehensive response to HIV/AIDS in emergency settings.

Efforts to address that problem will be more successful if they are reinforced by concrete action on the part of Member States, particularly by developing national strategies that address the spread of HIV among humanitarian workers and international peacekeepers. As one of the major troop-contributing countries to United Nations peacekeeping operations, Ukraine has been among the first to incorporate HIV/AIDS awareness, prevention and safe behaviour in predeployment training for its peacekeeping units.

With respect to humanitarian financing issues, my delegation notes with appreciation the reported progress in a number of areas under the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative. We welcome the development of the United Nations Needs Assessment Framework and Matrix and the work on a commonly agreed definition of what constitutes humanitarian assistance and component elements. In our view, it is equally important to ensure that the assistance provided is effectively managed and channelled to the priority areas.

We would also like to stress the need for better alignment between humanitarian assistance and long-term development strategies. The establishment of a standing mechanism comprised of the secretariats of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Development Group and the Executive Committee for Peace and Security is only a partial response to the needs of ensuring effective transition from relief to development. Therefore, ways to enhance cooperation between humanitarian agencies and development institutions should be further explored.

With respect to the transition from relief to development, I cannot but refer to the experience of Ukraine in mitigating the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. Now, more than 18 years after that tragic accident, the impact of the catastrophe on the lives of millions of affected people continues to pose an enormous challenge to my country. My delegation believes that the recent transfer of coordination functions for Chernobyl-related activities of the United Nations from OCHA to the United Nations Development Programme will stimulate resource mobilization and enhance the impact of the programmatic activities in this field. We also strongly hope for the continued support of the donor community in funding relevant development and health projects in the field.

As we attach special significance to the role of the United Nations in strengthening the international response to the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe, Ukraine, together with other interested delegations, took the initiative of planning a special plenary meeting in the spring of 2006, within the framework of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly to honour the victims of the Chernobyl disaster and to raise public awareness about the long-term consequences of the catastrophe. I hope the initiative will be supported by all Member States, and I encourage representatives of civil society, the private sector and the donor community to intensify their efforts in addressing Chernobyl-related problems.

In that context, my delegation would like particularly to highlight the increased role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Among recent examples, I am pleased to note that the Ukraine-based international NGO Chernobyl Union, which unites 7 million people affected by the Chernobyl catastrophe, presented its Mercy Ambassador award medal to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for his outstanding efforts aimed at mitigating and minimizing the long-term consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

Mr. Sawford (Australia): Today, in too many places around the world, communities are affected by crises, natural disasters and conflict. This has a very human cost, but it also sets back development and undermines efforts to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development. Australia continues to provide rapid and generous support for the survivors of crises and disasters, both within our region and globally. We contribute to relief efforts for emergencies wherever they occur, but our highest priority is the Asia-Pacific region, a region that is often ravaged by natural disasters and that is not immune to conflict. Member States are focusing on how best to ensure the most effective response to humanitarian needs. I would like to highlight seven of the issues Australia considers essential in this area.

The first is the protection of civilians. Protection of civilians affected by armed conflict is primarily the responsibility of national Governments. Sadly, we need look no further than Darfur to see evidence of how violence, especially sexual violence, has become a deliberate tactic to terrorize communities. The use of rape in conflict is particularly abhorrent.

The second is to improve security and access for humanitarian personnel. Humanitarian assistance cannot be delivered if those delivering it are not able to operate safely. But the very nature of humanitarian action means that it is often needed most in areas of instability. The challenge is to manage the risk effectively. We know that the Secretary-General has also made this a priority in his consideration of new measures to ensure the safety of United Nations personnel.

Third, we must integrate humanitarian assistance into the broader United Nations response to complex emergencies, but in a way that upholds humanitarian principles. More needs to be done to better define, assess and operationalize integrated missions. Australia is pleased to be supporting the review, addressing just these issues, conducted jointly by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the United Nations Development Group.

The fourth issue is using humanitarian response to lay the groundwork for recovery and reconstruction. Saving lives is only the beginning. Recovery must be a shared priority for humanitarian, development, peace and security actors. We are supportive of the focus that the United Nations is giving to transition and are keen to contribute actively to discussions on these issues.

The fifth is to find more effective ways to respond to natural disasters, to prevent, prepare for and mitigate their effects and to integrate disaster risk reduction into national development strategies — a key point for next year's World Conference on Disaster Reduction, to be held in Japan.

Sixth, we must strengthen further the system for humanitarian coordination. Again, while some progress has been made, events in Darfur earlier this year, as agencies scrambled to meet vast humanitarian needs, indicate that there is still room for improvement, particularly in the area of preparedness.

Seventh and last, we must ensure that gender aspects are properly assessed and are integrated into the planning, implementation and evaluation of humanitarian action. We also recognize the critical part women play as peace-builders. To find solutions which lead to lasting peace, we must find better ways to harness their potential as agents for positive change.

At the Economic and Social Council, Australia emphasized our support for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and its role. I would like to reiterate that support here today. We look forward to continuing to work with the Office and other humanitarian actors within and outside the United Nations system. Our collective aims must be to strengthen humanitarian policy and advocacy, to increase the effectiveness and impact of humanitarian programmes and to define ways to effectively monitor our performance. The ultimate goal of all of this, of course, is to improve the outcome for people affected by conflict, crisis or disaster.

Ms. Feller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to echo the expression of condolences extended to the Palestinian people by the Chairman of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States upon the death of President Yasser Arafat.

More than 2,500 deaths were caused by the hurricane season which struck the Caribbean barely a month ago, in addition to the thousands of injured and the almost total destruction of infrastructure. We know that most of the deaths occurred among the poorest section of the population, who were without access to information or basic services.

In the past 12 months, approximately 285 million people have been affected by natural disasters, and the property losses amounted to $65 billion. Those are extremely disquieting figures, especially because, in spite of the tremendous efforts of the international community, the frequency with which these disasters take place has markedly increased — and with it, the number of victims.

It is vital for us to stop just reacting to the situation and to develop specific long-term plans of action. As in many other areas, our capacity to respond to natural disasters will improve in proportion to our efforts to promote development. In this regard, and as part of a comprehensive strategy, we need to focus our efforts as States and as the international community on guaranteeing full access to basic health services, education and information for the most marginalized populations.

Likewise, the effectiveness of early warning mechanisms will be gauged by the extent to which they involve members of the communities in disaster-prone areas, especially those that are particularly vulnerable because of poverty and social exclusion.

My delegation reaffirms the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality which govern the provision of humanitarian assistance both in cases of natural disasters and in complex emergencies. Likewise, we believe that it is the key responsibility of the State to initiate, organize, coordinate and provide humanitarian assistance in its territory. In that connection, our countries should step up their endeavours to create the right channels, both nationally and locally, to ensure rapid and efficient delivery of

assistance to victims as well as unrestricted access for humanitarian personnel to affected areas.

Similarly, it is the responsibility of States, in close cooperation with civil society and humanitarian organizations, to identify exactly what assistance is needed to avoid an uncontrolled flow of aid, which ultimately would fail in its purpose.

At the same time, the setting of timetables for the provision of international assistance is another key point. That would ensure resources for the reconstruction phase, including matters of primary importance such as preventing epidemics, rebuilding and, above all, providing decent living conditions for victims.

The United Nations, particularly the Economic and Social Council, must strengthen its leadership and coordination capacities with regard to the endeavours of the international community in this regard. We believe it is important to recognize the significant role played in such cases by the communication media and non-governmental organizations. For that reason, we believe that, in natural and humanitarian disasters, it is essential to establish channels of communication with all actors involved in prevention and in rebuilding, so as to share experiences, harmonize the indicators used to measure the effects of disasters and undertake comprehensive action.

It is no secret to anyone that the growing number of natural disasters is directly linked to the continuing destruction of our environment. Thus, it is essential to begin by carrying out national plans to protect the environment, as well as to ensure effective management of natural resources. My delegation would like to appeal to all States to sign and ratify the existing treaties in this area, particularly the Kyoto Protocol, whose full implementation would make a significant contribution to stabilizing our ecosystem.

Lastly, I wish to stress that humanitarian assistance is a collective undertaking. It must be carried out in accordance with international law and international humanitarian law. Rarely has the international community shown as much solidarity, as in cases of natural disaster, where political and other interests take second place. That should be the general pattern in all cases of humanitarian emergencies. We need to continue to redouble our efforts to set up a clear and more effective strategy for averting tragedies that we can prevent.

Mr. Bantar (Mongolia): Let me begin by expressing my condolences on behalf of the Government and people of Mongolia to the bereaved family and the Palestinian people on the passing away of their father, husband and leader, the late President Yasser Arafat.

My delegation wishes to commend the Secretary-General for his reports on the agenda items under consideration. Mongolia associates itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

During the past decade, natural disasters have increased worldwide. The sevenfold increase in disaster fatalities in 2003, as compared with the previous year, is a grim reminder of the immense power of natural disasters. The past year has witnessed different types of natural disasters in various parts of the world, mostly in developing countries. According to the World Disasters Report 2004, when disasters occurred in countries with high human development, an average of 44 people were killed per event, while 300 people per event were killed in countries with low human development. However, when natural hazards take place, they do not discriminate between rich or poor countries. Disasters are a humanitarian challenge and an impediment to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Humanitarian action and disaster reduction is one of the core functions of the United Nations. The role of the United Nations in advocating principles of neutrality, impartiality, humanity and respect for the sovereignty of States during humanitarian activities is very important. Humanitarian problems should be solved through international cooperation and a common approach.

We share the concern regarding the increased involvement of commercial organizations and military forces in relief activities. The relevance and consequences of the provision of humanitarian assistance by military actors should be studied carefully.

We welcome the Organization's effort to respond to disasters with coherence and effectiveness, while integrating immediate relief measures with long-term strategies for disaster prevention. The strengthening of the coordination of the humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations greatly depends upon increased support from the extended donor community.

Meanwhile, the United Nations needs to further explore mechanisms to ensure that there are appropriate resources for humanitarian activities. Mongolia supports and stresses the importance of the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative.

Natural hazards cannot be avoided, but their dramatic consequences can be greatly reduced through appropriate preparedness and risk-reduction measures, including education, technology development, land-use planning and environmental protection. Devising indicators and targets to monitor and to evaluate the responses to natural disasters, at the national and regional levels might be a useful exercise as part of the endeavours to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

The utilization of modern technology, especially the Internet for early warning and alert systems, should be further explored and introduced in the field. We welcome the new Platform for the Promotion of Early Warning, which was established in Bonn under the auspices of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

The passing year witnessed dramatic and disturbing occasions when humanitarian personnel were directly attacked while performing their noble duty. Safety and security are essential preconditions for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Regarding national measures taken to prevent and respond to security incidents that involve the United Nations and its associated personnel, Mongolia acceded to the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel in February 2004.

Mongolia is vulnerable to a variety of natural disasters such as severe snowfalls, droughts, flash floods and earthquakes. At the start of the new millennium, Mongolia had already been hit hard by three years of countrywide droughts in summer and by calamitous winters. In particular, the economically vital livestock industry was devastated. The country is still trying hard to recover from that disaster. Mongolia is grateful to the United Nations and other donors for the assistance they have given and for the positive response to the joint appeal by the United Nations and the Government of Mongolia during that time.

Furthermore, I would like to note our appreciation of the work of the United Nations to strengthen and develop a variety of disaster response tools for assisting and supporting national response capacity. Here I would like to particularly underline the ongoing project by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other international partners in developing a long-term strategy and building institutional capability for disaster preparedness and management in Mongolia.

With the support of the UNDP, the Government of Mongolia has taken important steps. We have moved from military to civilian control of disaster management, with the adoption of a new Law on Civil Protection in June 2003, and the establishment of the National Disaster Management Agency in January 2004.

The natural disaster response capacity of Mongolia is still in need of improvement. More importantly, it is the people who must be prepared because the measure of our success will be the reduction of people's dependence on handouts and appeals and their ability to create the livelihoods of their choice without fear of disaster.

The Government of Mongolia appreciates the July 2004 mission by the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Standby Team (UNDAC), which analysed disaster response in my country. The team's recommendations, contained in the report, are valuable and practical for improving disaster response systems.

We have taken note of the UNDAC team's precaution that the natural disaster with the greatest impact in Mongolia would be an earthquake in Ulaanbaatar, the capital city of Mongolia, in which a considerable number of the entire population reside. Thus, we are looking forward to cooperation with our international assistance partners in building urban and rescue capacity in Mongolia.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to express my country's full support and further cooperation with the United Nations in discharging its life-saving tasks in the humanitarian field. My delegation believes that the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, to be held in January 2005, in Kobe, Japan, will become a milestone in advancing our common interest in disaster reduction. The Mongolian delegation is prepared to participate actively in that conference.

Mr. Kamanzi (Rwanda): Allow me to begin by joining other delegations in expressing my

Government's condolences to the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people on the death of their leader, President Yasser Arafat.

My delegation would like to align itself with the statement delivered on behalf of Member States of the African Union by the representative of Nigeria, and the statement delivered by the representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The General Assembly is aware that the 1994 genocide in Rwanda completely decimated the social, economic and political fabric of the country. Ten years, later as a result of the noble and concerted efforts of the Government of Rwanda and some members of the international community, progress has been achieved, in both economic and political terms. However, the most vulnerable members of our society, the survivors of the genocide — particularly the orphans, widows and victims of sexual violence — continue to suffer from the effects of the genocide and live desperate lives characterized by poverty, disease and hopelessness.

The Rwandan Government has worked tirelessly to improve the conditions of life and health of the genocide survivors. Since 1994, it has allocated 5 per cent of its annual expenditures to assisting groups of genocide survivors. However, this Assembly is aware that Rwanda has limited means, and while we recognize and appreciate the support that the international community has given us in this area so far, we would like to note that living conditions for the genocide survivors remain desperate.

On behalf of the Government and people of Rwanda, we would therefore like to call upon all Member States to support the draft resolution the African Union intends to introduce under agenda item 39 (a), entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations".

Finally, in view of the serious situation in which survivors of the genocide find themselves, my Government would like to appeal to members of the General Assembly to begin to consider how they can work with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to support the survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

Mr. Zenna (Ethiopia): Sir, allow me to express my deepest sorrow on the passing away of a great leader, President Yasser Arafat, and to express my condolences to the people, the Government and the family of the late President.

I wish to extend my sincere appreciation to the Secretary-General for his revealing report, entitled "Strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations", as contained in document A/59/93. I would like to share with the Assembly our experience in humanitarian assistance in the area of coordination and transition from relief to development and partnership.

It is to be recalled that the frequently occurring drought in Ethiopia made 13.2 million people vulnerable to an acute food crisis in 2003. However, through the coordinated and collaborative efforts of the Government of Ethiopia, the agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system, the donor community, non-governmental organizations and other entities, the food crisis was effectively curtailed. Therefore, let me seize this opportunity to thank all our partners for their cooperation and partnership in helping Ethiopia to avert the threatened food crisis of 2003.

In spite of the enormous amount of activity that was deployed to reverse the potentially devastating 2003 situation, natural calamities continue to impede our efforts to mitigate the effects of drought. According to an assessment made by the United Nations multi-agency team, some 10 per cent of the population, or about 8 million people, currently remain vulnerable and in need of emergency relief assistance. Based on that assessment, crop failure exists in different parts of the country due to unfavourable rains during the so-called "belg" season.

Several areas are of special concern, including the Somali region, East and West Hararghe, and the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region (SNNPR). Some of the zones in the SNNPR most affected by the serious drought of 2002-2003 are again under serious threat. The season's crop performance by the SNNPR was the poorest, with an estimated yield loss ranging from 50 to 90 per cent. The physical status of livestock is reported at the moment to be generally good, due to the availability of failed crops as livestock feed resources, as well as occasional rain, but there is no certainty how long those conditions will last. In general, the food security prospects are extremely poor, and, according to the assessment of the multi-agency

team, around 500,000 metric tons of food aid is required.

In the area of non-food requirements, an effective way to conduct the assessment is required. In that regard, coordination needs to be strengthened with respect to non-food needs assessment and needs determination, as well as on resource mobilization for capacity-building. In order to have a better articulated managerial system for the assessment, implementation and monitoring of non-food assistance, coordination between the Government and other stakeholders, including United Nations agencies, needs to be enhanced.

The underlying causes of food insecurity and issues of recovery, assets protection and sustainable development of the affected areas in my country must be addressed. In that connection, the Government has continued to exert maximum efforts to mitigate the effects of recurrent drought. From the launching of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and prioritizing and implementing the food security strategy to strengthening the Early Warning System, the Government continues relentlessly in its efforts to mitigate the effects of drought. In that regard, my Government takes this opportunity to thank the international community for its prompt support to our long-term solutions, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 58/24. Also, in this connection, we commend members of the Group of Eight for their statement of commitment at their recent annual meeting to end famine in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.

Finally, in underscoring the importance of partnership, let me share with you what the Prime Minister of Ethiopia recently stated in relation to Ethiopia's Action Plan to meeting the Millennium Development Goals as they apply to hunger:

> "We have agreed with our development partners that the farmers will need support to the tune of $500 million a year for five years if we are to achieve our objective of ensuring food security within that time. There has also been an understanding that the Ethiopian Government should cover 40 per cent of the cost from its own revenue. We have in our most recent budget allocated slightly over $230 million, which is more than 40 per cent of the required cost. Likewise, many of our development partners are beginning to respond quickly and generously. As long as we all do our share, I am confident that implementation will be as good as the strategy we have articulated and that, therefore, we will attain our objective of achieving food security within five years."

Ethiopia has presented a draft resolution under this item, and we are counting on the support of all Member States.

Mr. Shacham (Israel): Israel understands that today is a day of profound sorrow for our Palestinian neighbours. Yet this day also presents an opportunity for renewed momentum in a quest for peace between our two peoples. We hope that all parties will seize this opportunity to fashion a better future together.

I will confine my comments today to agenda sub-item 39 (c), "Assistance to the Palestinian people".

Israel shares the belief of the international community that all people, in the Middle East and elsewhere, should be able to live prosperous and full lives in security and peace, with standards of living befitting universal human dignity. The Palestinian people, of course, are no exception to that. On the contrary, Israel is particularly interested in the conditions of all our neighbouring communities, especially the Palestinians. Well-being within a nation helps to foster harmony between nations. The Palestinian people are not our enemies; they are our neighbours, and we seek to live side by side with them in mutual respect and mutual dignity. Both Israelis and Palestinians deserve to live in security and in peace. The suffering of both peoples is a humanitarian problem, and the right of both peoples to self-determination must be respected.

In exceedingly difficult security conditions, Israel continues to do all that it can to help the Palestinian people meet their humanitarian needs. That ranges from direct financial and humanitarian assistance to participation in multilateral endeavours alongside other members of the international community, and to the serious consideration given to humanitarian needs within the context of Israel's security imperatives. Let us not forget, after all, that Israel does that while confronting a brutal Palestinian terror campaign against its citizenry — a war that, in subverting any chances for peace, does immense harm to both the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, a battle against terrorists who have no respect for life or for law and

whose violence endangers Palestinian lives just as it targets Israeli ones.

This terror is of no assistance to the Palestinian people. It is terror that causes hardship, not hardship that causes terror. It is terror that is the enemy of peace and the enemy of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples alike. It is terrorism that makes humanitarian assistance and progress towards peace so difficult. It is the terrorists who hide among civilians and see any humanitarian gesture as merely an opening for further attacks. That is the difficult reality in which humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people must be examined. Israeli security measures are made necessary by that reality, and the humanitarian situation cannot be properly considered without an appreciation of the context and the causes that have brought it about.

The report before us recognizes some of Israel's contributions and sacrifices, as well as some of the difficulties it faces because of its constant need to balance the humanitarian needs of the Palestinians with the security needs of Israelis. As the report notes in paragraph 7, "The Palestinian Authority did not bring an end to violence and terrorism. It failed to reform its security apparatus according to provisions of the road map". And because of that, the report states in paragraph 9, "Reprehensible terrorist attacks by Palestinian groups continue to visit carnage and fear on Israelis". The report also notes in paragraph 52 that "data showed a clear relationship between political or security developments and the severity of access restrictions", because those restrictions are not arbitrary but rather come out of a response to terrorism. Accordingly, as the report notes in paragraph 88, "Effective steps by the Palestinian Authority to lessen Israel's security concerns would facilitate" the effort to improve the conditions of the Palestinian people.

Israel has done its utmost, together with the donor community and international organizations, to promote assistance to the Palestinian population. Yet, as the report notes, as soon as new humanitarian arrangements are put into effect, terror groups find a way to use them to their own advantage to carry out violent attacks against Israelis. One example, discussed in the report, is the smuggling earlier this year of terrorists — who were hiding in a shipping container — into an Israeli port, where they embarked upon a shooting rampage, killing and wounding several Israeli civilians.

Until a Palestinian leadership emerges that is willing and capable of acting to eliminate the terrorism that constantly disrupts the hopes for peace in the region, Israel will work to help the Palestinian people, even as it works to maintain the safety of its citizens. Problems remain and dilemmas are faced in the light of the continuing terrorist threat, but Israel is committed to facilitating and assisting the improvement of the humanitarian situation.

We are pleased to say that this year revenues have been transferred from Israel to the Palestinian Authority on schedule each month, accounting for nearly $50 million monthly. Israel has developed a much more efficient working relationship with humanitarian organizations on the ground, and new operating procedures have been instituted at checkpoints and crossing points to speed the transfer of humanitarian shipments, such as ambulances and the like. In addition, special trucking terminals now operate between the West Bank and Israel to provide an ongoing system of transport for produce and other goods.

Some 25,000 Palestinian workers and merchants enter Israeli daily from the West Bank and Gaza, with nearly 20,000 more working in Israeli communities within those territories and in the industrial parks adjacent to them. Trade with Israel accounts for more than 80 per cent of the trade of the Palestinian Authority. We feel, and act on, a responsibility towards our neighbours. In fact, despite the continuing campaign of terrorism, trade between Israel and the Palestinian Authority increased by 16 per cent from 2002 to 2003. In a further effort to ease the economic burden on the Palestinian people, and despite the security challenges involved, Israel facilitates transportation and crossings between Palestinian areas and neighbouring countries — for example, the Rafah crossing to Egypt and the Damia and Allenby bridges to Jordan.

Perhaps the most important initiative that Israel is taking upon itself to alleviate the situation is the disengagement plan. Prime Minister Sharon's bold and courageous plan — which was recently ratified by the Knesset, Israel's parliament — involves the dismantling of civilian localities and military installations in Gaza and the northern West Bank by the end of next year. It aims to stabilize the humanitarian and security situation, providing Israelis with greater security, providing Palestinians with

greater control over their lives and facilitating greater freedom of movement for people and goods.

As the international community — including the Quartet — has recognized, the disengagement plan has the potential to jump-start the peace process and to bring both sides back to the course projected by the road map. We are hopeful that, by facilitating greater Palestinian self-determination and by urging the Palestinian leadership to live up to its own obligations and commitments, the peace process can regain its footing. It can and must be hoped that that initiative, combined with a return to the road map, will facilitate a true form of assistance to both the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

As Prime Minister Sharon said in his statement on the eve of the adoption by the Knesset of the disengagement plan on 25 October:

> "I have repeatedly and publicly said that I support the establishment of a Palestinian State alongside the State of Israel. I have repeatedly and openly said that I am willing to make painful compromises in order to put an end to this ongoing and malignant conflict between those who struggle over this land, and that I would do my utmost in order to bring peace. ...
>
> "We have no desire to permanently rule over millions of Palestinians ... Israel, which wishes to be an exemplary democracy, will not be able to bear such a reality over time. The disengagement plan presents the possibility of opening a gate to a different reality".

All those measures, and the significant assistance of the international community, are important — but none are a substitute for peace. Neither the Israeli nor the Palestinian people will realize the prosperity, the security and the dignity they deserve until there is an end to the brutal strategy of terrorism and a commitment to resolve outstanding issues in a spirit of mutual recognition and mutual compromise. No peace can come without a Palestinian leadership focused on the creation of a viable, democratic, accountable and peaceful Palestinian State, rather than one focused on the demise of the Israeli State.

Part of the assistance provided to the Palestinian people must, therefore, involve a concerted effort to bring an end, finally and irreversibly, to the morally bankrupt strategy of terrorism that has brought untold suffering to both Israelis and Palestinians. It must encourage an approach that seeks to build Palestinian institutions committed to coexistence, not conflict. With a reformed leadership that is ready to take responsibility and is ready to treat victimhood as a condition to be remedied, rather than a strategy to be fostered, the Palestinian people will find in Israel a willing, responsible and committed negotiating partner for peace, in accordance with the Road Map process. This is the path to true peace, security and stability for both peoples and one that we must all work towards.

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with General Assembly resolution 45/6 of 16 October 1990, I now give the floor to the Observer of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Mr. Paclisanu (International Committee of the Red Cross): On behalf of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), allow me to thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the floor at this fifty-ninth session of the United Nations General Assembly.

The ICRC wishes to take this opportunity to briefly share, at the outset, its views concerning present-day conflict environments and the approaches we have adopted, with the aim of rendering humanitarian action both more effective and safer.

Today's conflict environment is mainly characterized by the number and complexity of non-international armed conflicts, sometimes with external involvement. In certain parts, there is an increasing polarization taking place. This renders the acceptance of independent and neutral humanitarian action extremely difficult, because it engenders the conviction that all involved in such action are in fact taking sides. This conviction is further reinforced when humanitarian action is seen as being instrumentalized through its integration by State actors as an additional tool in the pursuit of their military strategy and political objectives. As a consequence, there is a risk that humanitarian principles will be eroded, that humanitarian action will be rejected and that the security of humanitarian personnel will be seriously compromised.

The ICRC, therefore, strongly believes that, in order for it to fulfil the mandate it has received from States to protect and assist victims of armed conflict, the neutrality and independence of humanitarian action must be vigorously defended. Humanitarian work must be independent, i.e. distinct from political decision-

making processes and perceived as such. It must be neutral in that humanitarian action and political-military action should be kept clearly separate, avoiding the blurring of lines produced by the integration of humanitarian responses into an overall military strategy. For these reasons, the ICRC cannot subscribe to approaches that combine political, military and humanitarian tools in the midst of armed conflict or violence.

In this regard, the ICRC insists on respect for the identity, mandate and operating principles of each separate actor. The extent of its coordination on the ground with other actors would thus depend on the degree to which the perception of the ICRC as a neutral and independent organization can be preserved.

In our view, the ICRC's choice to retain impartiality, independence and neutrality as key principles of its identity and action forms a good basis for coordination, which needs to rely on a clear repartition of roles and responsibilities among various actors. This is an essential ingredient for realistic and meaningful humanitarian coordination, which, in the face of the dimensions and complexity of humanitarian needs, is necessary in order to render humanitarian action more effective. This is the ultimate and unique goal of all coordination efforts.

For the ICRC, coordination involves regular dialogue and consultation aimed at publicizing programmes and activities and avoiding duplication, at exchanging views and experiences that help contribute to improving responses and enhancing security. The ICRC considers that such complementarity among humanitarian actors flows from their distinct mandates, expertise and operating principles and methods. Within the framework of this approach, the ICRC coordinates with, but is not coordinated by, other humanitarian actors. This fact is vital for the ICRC, if it is to preserve its independence and neutrality, which underlies its acceptance by all parties to an armed conflict and thereby enables it to fulfil its specific mandate.

It is in this perspective that the ICRC participates in United Nations multilateral coordination mechanisms and structures, both at Headquarters and in the field, such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, of which it is a standing invitee, and the United Nations country teams. Through such regular dialogue and mutual consultation with other humanitarian actors on thematic issues and operational questions, the ICRC contributes to the common goal of more effective humanitarian action. At the bilateral level, for example, the ICRC/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees high-level meetings have become a regular event. This year's June meeting saw discussions on humanitarian action and security in a changing conflict environment, as well as on cooperation between the two organizations on specific issues, such as resettlement of former combatants. Again, in August, two new documents guiding the relationship between the ICRC and the World Food Programme entered into force. These will significantly facilitate exchanges of information, knowledge and material resources between the two organizations.

Finally, the ICRC is convinced that it remains of vital importance to engage and maintain a transparent dialogue with all actors, while respecting the operating principles and distinct mandates of each, if humanitarian coordination is to bear its full fruits.

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with General Assembly resolution 47/4 dated 16 October 1992, I now give the floor to the Observer of the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Mr. Dall'Oglio (International Organization for Migration): The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is pleased to contribute to these deliberations today as one of the agencies participating in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, which, since the adoption of resolution 46/182, has become the principal mechanism for the coordination of operations related to humanitarian and relief disaster assistance. The support, protection and stabilization of populations forced to leave their homes because of conflict or natural disasters is an area in which IOM has, over the years, come to specialize. It is active in a number of areas relevant to both emergency response and transition phases.

IOM fully shares the recommendations made in the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations and would like to offer some comments on two issues we consider of particular relevance at this time.

First, we would like to observe that considerable efforts have been made over the past few months to improve the combined capacities of humanitarian

actors to provide a more timely, predictable and coordinated response to crises of internal displacement, starting with a more proactive field level response. In addressing crises associated with internally displaced persons, members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) have opted for a collaborative approach in recognition that such an institutional framework currently represents the most appropriate modality to mobilize the broad range of expertise available in the system.

Under the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, the commitment of all involved agencies to pursue the collaborative approach has gained momentum, and a number of tools to assist in its implementation have recently been developed. Among them, we would like to stress the relevance of the efforts to strengthen the Internal Displacement Division of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), a more vigorous and proactive role for the Humanitarian Coordinator in providing United Nations country teams with strategic coordination of protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, and the shared definition of a procedural road map for the assignment of tasks among IASC members.

In addition, the guidance note on durable solutions for displaced persons — refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees — recently developed by the United Nations Development Group represents a valuable measure to streamline population displacement issues into common country assessment and United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) processes so as to facilitate transitional programming.

All of the above are useful, important and timely measures. They must now produce the expected results.

The situation in Darfur is an example of the complex coordination required to address a crisis of enormous proportions. Under the leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator, IOM has recently initiated the development and implementation of the Management and Coordination Mechanism on the Voluntary Return of Internally Displaced Persons in Darfur, which will provide for appropriate monitoring and reporting mechanisms to ensure that the return of internally displaced persons remains safe, free and voluntary. This activity is pursuant to the signature on 21 August of a memorandum of understanding between the Government of the Sudan, IOM and the United Nations, which laid the basis for a commitment to the voluntary returns of internally displaced persons.

Secondly, for IOM, being part of the Consolidated Appeals Process — for which the global launch for 2005 took place just few hours ago — is another key element of our IASC involvement. IOM is in fact participating in five of the 14 appeals that have been launched today. Indeed, we recognize the Consolidated Appeals Process as a strategic planning and programming process, not just a resource mobilization tool. In all honesty, as the Secretary-General indicated, it is of concern that the pattern of response does not necessarily reflect real improvement in the process and the end product, nor does it necessarily reflect the most pressing needs.

I would like to conclude these remarks by reaffirming the value IOM attaches to its participation in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and our support for the on-going collaborative efforts, including those described above, taken by the Emergency Relief Coordinator to advance a shared environment for the attainment of key humanitarian policies and goals. Finally, we take this opportunity to renew to Under-Secretary-General Egeland and to his team at OCHA, on behalf of IOM's Director General, our sincere appreciation for their professionalism, dedication and inclusiveness in their collaboration with our organization.

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with General Assembly resolution 49/2 of 19 October 1994, I now call on the Observer of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Ms. Powell (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies): This agenda item and the debate in the General Assembly plenary is in many respects the centrepiece of the presentations made by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in the United Nations each year.

Permit me to refer to my own country, Jamaica. We have recently experienced a need for properly coordinated humanitarian assistance. The Jamaica Red Cross, of which I am the President Emeritus, was profoundly involved in preparing for and responding to Hurricane Ivan, which struck in September. Once the hurricane's path was established, our staff and volunteers took part, along with the relevant

Government agencies, in meetings convened by the National Office of Disaster Preparedness. Community-based teams were trained prior to the arrival of the hurricane. Once it struck, we identified the people in need, managed the emergency shelters and prepared detailed assessments of the damage and requirements, which enabled vulnerability to be properly addressed.

The experience of Grenada illustrates the impact of Hurricane Ivan on our region. At least two thirds of the homes in Grenada were destroyed. The country's economy is traditionally based on tourism and cash crops such as nutmeg. Given that a nutmeg tree takes seven years to bear its first fruit, the economic impact of this disaster is clear. Once again, we see how important it is to integrate disaster preparedness and risk reduction into national development planning.

The debate this year takes place amidst rising concern on the part of agencies, Member States, non-governmental organizations and the communities themselves about the ways in which humanitarian assistance programmes are conceived and delivered. One of the main reasons for concern is that humanitarian assistance today is very different from what it was in the past.

Many important issues that the IFRC has advocated for decades have only recently been prioritized by Governments. It is fortunate that the Millennium Development Goals have placed a clear emphasis on vulnerability and need. That is perhaps the most important new development in how the international community considers humanitarian assistance.

As a regular participant in the work of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the IFRC has the advantage of being in constant dialogue with United Nations partners and others about the priorities and directions of humanitarian assistance. Our role, as the co-chair of the IASC Inter-Agency Task Force on Disaster Reduction, has brought forth some points worthy of note today by Member States and by the wider international community.

There are currently two important initiatives that which deserve special attention. One is the process known as good humanitarian donorship. It encourages the strengthening, effectiveness, efficiency and timeliness of humanitarian action, as well as the necessity of long-term commitments. And here, we must commend the Government of Canada for hosting the October 2004 meeting in Ottawa.

The other initiative, recently launched by the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator seeks to review the capacity of global humanitarian response. This initiative originates from the concern that the international community is often unable to meet the basic needs of populations affected by emergencies and crises. We look forward to further discussion of this issue at the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Principals meeting in Geneva in December. We will bring forward the experiences of our members worldwide to this meeting. We strongly believe that response is not only the task of international actors, but it is most frequently provided at the national level and, very often, by Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies at the community level.

Community resilience, which is the theme of the Federation's 2004 World Disasters Report, should be integrated into the way that humanitarian assistance is conceived and provided. In this context, we are paying close attention to the forthcoming World Conference on Disaster Reduction, to be held in Kobe in January 2005. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) has been invited to moderate one of the high-level round tables, where we hope to stimulate discussion on challenges, needs and opportunities in disaster risk reduction initiatives worldwide. We have accepted this opportunity and are working with the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and all the stakeholders to prepare for that important event. We sincerely hope that the Conference will take account of the IFRC project on international disaster response, laws, rules and principles, all of the concerns of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction.

Our experience shows that coordinating humanitarian assistance has become increasingly challenging. This reflects not only the complexity of the issue, but also the sharp growth in the number of stakeholders. This coordination is, of course, welcome. Accordingly, it is the reason why another of the important events of this year is so vital, namely the consideration of the recommendations contained in the Cardoso Report, which is the Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations and Civil Society Relations. We highlight the importance of this because our role as the auxiliary to Government and the bridge to civil society has given us many insights into the urgency of this need. Without community involvement, coordinated solutions are unlikely.

Finally, the challenge for all of us is not simply to coordinate humanitarian assistance, but to make sure that this assistance reaches people like those in Grenada, and reaches them quickly, effectively and lastingly.

The President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 39 and its sub-items (a) and (c). I should like to inform Members that, at the request of the sponsors, action on draft resolution A/59/L.24 will be taken at a later date. The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 39 and its sub-items (a) and (c).

Agenda item 35 (*continued*)

Culture of peace

Notes by the Secretary-General (A/59/201 and A/59/223)

Draft resolution (A/59/L.15/Rev.1)

The President (*spoke in French*): Members will recall that the Assembly held a debate on agenda item 35 at its 41st and 42nd plenary meetings on 26 and 27 October 2004. In connection with this item, the Assembly now has before it draft resolution A/59/L.15/Rev.1.

The General Assembly will now take action on draft resolution A/59/L.15/Rev.1 entitled "Promotion of interreligious dialogue". Before we take action, I would like to indicate that, since its preparation, the following sponsors have been added to resolution A/59/L.15/Rev.1: Argentina, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Peru, Thailand and Uruguay.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt resolution A/59/L.15/Rev.1.

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 59/23).

Mr. Gatan (Philippines): My delegation is pleased to take this opportunity to thank the Assembly for the adoption by consensus of the resolution on the promotion of interreligious dialogue. I would like in particular to thank the 24 delegations that sponsored the resolution coming from all continents of the world. May I also thank the delegations that provided constructive inputs and facts for the resolution, both in form and substance, particularly the observer delegations of the Holy See, of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the delegations of the European Union, Argentina, Switzerland, Canada and others during the consultations convened by the Philippines. This resolution is a landmark in United Nations history, opening the door of the United Nations to partnership with civil society in general and the religious sector in particular. We look forward to a fruitful interaction with faith-based organizations in the years ahead.

Mr. Smagulov (Kazakhstan): The General Assembly has just adopted a resolution that is very important in raising awareness in the international community of the need to promote interreligious dialogue. The resolution recognizes the commitment of all religions to peace and stability in the world. We thank the delegation of the Philippines for its input in the promotion of interreligious dialogue. This issue has become particularly vital in Kazakhstan, as in many other countries. We attach great importance to the promotion of religion, religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation.

We also consider it important that the resolution refers to the first Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions held in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, in September 2003. This international forum made a valuable contribution to the promotion of the culture of peace and dialogue among civilizations.

A second congress will be held in Kazakhstan in September 2006 to further address pressing political and spiritual problems. We believe that that event will be fully supported by States Members of the United Nations and by regional and non-governmental organizations.

The President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 35.

Programme of work

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to remind members that, as of Monday, 15 November 2004, the General Assembly and its Main Committees will revert to their usual practice of holding meetings from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

We are almost at the end of Ramadan. I offer members my best wishes for Eid al-Fitr.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.